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### • Media globalization: an Indian perspective

#### Ravi Sundaram

*Centre for Studies of Developing Societies, New Delhi, India*

It is no exaggeration to say that the 1990s have been quite crucial to the transformation of Indian media networks and industries. Bear in mind that the Indian media scene for a long time was largely limited to national boundaries and one that closely followed the old cartographic imagination of Indian nationalism. To be sure, Indian cinema had dynamic regional distribution networks in Africa, South East Asia, the USSR and the Middle East, but here the cultural transmission of the Hindi film far outweighed any serious economic returns comparable to Hollywood, or what was to come in the 1990s. Television only took off after the 1980s, with a large state network that crisscrossed the country. The 1980s were in fact important dress rehearsals for the next decade, while the state network created a large new television viewing public,

and cassette culture transformed the music industry and broke the stranglehold of transnational music forms that had dominated the old LP record business. As Peter Manuel's work shows, cassette culture opened new markets, produced new artists and music forms, and hugely expanded the market. Both in production and circulation, cassette culture stood at the borderline of the property regime, a feature that clearly anticipated the form the 'global' decade of the 1990s would take.

Thus the media explosion of the 1990s, commonly going under the shorthand 'globalization', was not without a history, but was marked by a certain concentration of both media forms and temporal acceleration. Consider this: within a few years India saw satellite cable television growing from just a handful to a total of 80 channels, and the growth of other media in the form of cassettes, CDs, VCDs, MP3s, and DVDs. Media ownership was extremely diverse. New empires emerged from satellite television, moving into distribution, and later into film production. For the most part television distribution remained extremely fragmented; cable was largely retailed by smaller independent players in the neighbourhood, which frustrated efforts to corporatize as in other countries. Cable television had actually grown through local ownership (local youth wired their locality and took feed from satellites), who would collect money from consumers.

By the late 1990s, multi-service providers emerged, pushed by large television networks offering franchises to local players, but this only increased conflicts at the local level between rival operators. For the most part cable distribution remains in the informal sector, and a source of conflicts over intellectual property. In music a large new production network now exists in the informal sector, producing a range of remixes, religious, crossovers and versions of official film music. The larger companies have been hit hard by lowered costs of production and the ability of the small players to dynamically respond to musical tastes and produce new artistes. Film music, once a dominant part of the market (80%) has seen its share slipping slowly, at any rate copy culture makes market control impossible.

In the case of Bombay cinema, the scene remains confusing with the industry lurching from crisis to crisis. Most of the rhetoric seems to be against 'piracy' as a reason for losses, but the quality of scripts has been declining, a constant complaint in the industry. The crisis has led to a brief opening for new medium-budget productions with new stars and directors; these include crossover productions aimed at the global/Indian multiplex market as well as urban terror/gangster films promoted

by Ram Gopal Verma. Within the industry the Yash-Raj Films banner, as well as the production company of Karan Johar are the most aggressive on global distribution, with simultaneous releases in diaspora-linked multiplexes worldwide, and extravagant high budget family films. The global network includes the lucrative international distribution contracts (largely controlled by Yash-Raj Films), theme events on 'Bollywood', stage shows, and brand promotions.

In short, we can distinguish *two* layers in the contemporary landscape of media in India from the 1990s whose relationship can at best be described as porous. At one level are the new media empires: the corporate owners of satellite television channels, large software companies located in the techno-cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad, and the advertising companies in Bombay. The large software companies have been the most profitable in the stock market, and operate in real time with Western contractors, and employ thousands of programmers. The second level is the large and dynamic informal and often illegal media space of urban India, which has, for all practical purposes, retailed the new cultural constellation to the mass of citizens. This includes the thousands of small cable television networks, publicly operated phone booths in neighborhoods which number in their millions, street music sellers, pirate and non-copyright media producers, the large grey computer market, and public internet access points.

What then of the 1990s? If anything it was a decade where the mundane became visible in dramatic ways in India's cities, through the circulation of tens of thousands of new media objects: print flyers, signage mobile phones, music cassettes and CDs, new forms of media production, circulation, a kind of 'visual frenzy'. Benjamin speaks of the 'actuality of the everyday', when the contemporary becomes *the* marker of urban experience. There are times when this 'actuality of the everyday' suddenly takes meaning: London and Paris in the 19th century; Calcutta for the new urban elites at the turn of the 20th century; Berlin in the 1900s; Bombay from after the Second World War to the 1970s; Delhi and Bangalore in the 1990s. The actuality of the everyday foregrounds the temporal experience of presentness. In the Indian case this marker came about through a new object-world of constant mechanical reproduction, where urban citizens became participants in a dizzying world of new commodities, many often produced outside the legal realm of property through copies.

In his classic 1936 artwork essay ('The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'), Walter Benjamin spoke about how, with the

arrival of the copy, authentic experience based on privileged ownership of the 'original' is rendered anachronistic. The copy, with its 'cheap sensoriality', allows a more intense experience of the world, a kind of magical world of objects, in a world where distraction and tactility exist side by side.

In Delhi and in India generally, a significant part of the media experience of the 1990s came from networks that were part of this culture of the copy, a world that I have called pirate modernity. Pirate modern culture transformed production and circulation of commodities using the non-legal media copy as a general form for producing and reproducing objects in the city. I wrote the following in a recent essay:

It is part of a world where experience as we know it is increasingly commodified, and informationalised. For the globalising middle-class in India this is happening through the more familiar modes of incorporation: credit cards and credit rating agencies, frequent flyers, vacations, niche marketing, ATM cards and monthly billing cycles, corporate consumer campaigns, brand environments, all generating vast amounts of information. This is the more conventional generic world of the new globalisation. The networks of pirate culture on the other hand, usually target the urban populations outside this world, but are nevertheless increasingly drawn to the commodified forms of urban experience. Local markets, neighbourhood music/video stores, grayware computer and audio-video assemblers, independent cable operators are usually part of the pirate network of distribution, which also 'bleeds' into other parts of the city. The commodities of the copy are multi-use, recombined/recycled and in near-constant circulation. In Delhi the media copy exists in a symbiotic relationship with all other commodities and industries: clothes, cosmetics, medicine, household goods, and also car and machine parts. As is evident, copy culture pits pirate modernity right into a global social conflict on definitions of *property*.

Media and film research in India, which for many years remained within the models of *ideologikritik*, has now opened up to historical and contemporary studies, as well as an engagement of digital networks and the emerging industrial form of the media itself. Research is at a very early stage, but given the enormity of the task and a wide-ranging catalog of issues, some exciting interventions should be expected in the next few years.